

VOLUME IX

G R E A T A M E R I C A N S P I R I T U A L S



THE LORD'S PRAYER • SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT!
DE GOSPEL TRAIN • RIDE ON, KING JESUS!



STEREO

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These spirituals astonish with their rhythmic vigor, the ear-bending intervals of their melodies, and the acute power of their message.

Great American Spirituals vol. 9

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|----|---|------|----|--|--------------|
| 1 | Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* | 3:40 | 14 | Joshua Fit Da Battle of Jericho** | 2:14 |
| 2 | Oh What a Beautiful City* | 2:28 | 15 | Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!* | 3:02 |
| 3 | Ain't Got Time to Die* | 2:25 | 16 | Talk About a Child That do Love Jesus* | 3:09 |
| 4 | Lord, I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray* | 2:25 | 17 | Fix Me, Jesus* | 3:35 |
| 5 | Honor, Honor** | 1:56 | 18 | Plenty Good Room** | 1:56 |
| 6 | I've Been 'Buked** | 3:20 | 19 | De Gospel Train** | 1:41 |
| 7 | On Ma Journey** | 2:14 | 20 | The Lord's Prayer** | 2:47 |
| 8 | Deep River* | 3:15 | 21 | I Love the Name** | 3:43 |
| 9 | When I Lay My Burden Down* | 2:00 | 22 | This Little Light of Mine* | 2:05 |
| 10 | Ain't That Good News!* | 1:14 | 23 | Ride on, King Jesus* | 2:00 |
| 11 | Sweet Little Jesus Boy* | 3:26 | 24 | In Bright Mansions Above** | 2:37 |
| 12 | He's Got the Whole World in His Hands** | 2:40 | 25 | His Name So Sweet** | 2:29 |
| 13 | Roun' About De Mountain** | 3:01 | | | 64:00 |

Kathleen Battle*
Soprano

Barbara Hendricks+
Soprano

Florence Quivar**
M

one note to the next and their striking rhythmical qualities, whether swing rhythm or the livelier hand clapping rhythm, together formed the most unique and original music that America has produced and are the roots of the many forms of music that continue to manifest themselves to this day."

It was the African-American composer and singer Harry Burleigh who pioneered the notation of spirituals with his historic arrangement of "Deep River", setting them and performing them for the first time virtually as art songs. He had a profound influence on Antonin Dvorak, the Czech composer who was one of his teachers and a champion of nationalism in music. Burleigh must be an indirect influence at least on Dvorak's sterling (and original) homage to the spiritual in the slow movement of the "New World" Symphony, a melody often sung, in the manner of a spiritual, to the words "Goin' Home".

During the last 75 years, great concert singers have included spirituals in their repertoire. Because African-Americans were barred for so long from most opera and concert stages, these singers were generally white. Recordings have captured their quaint, easily misunderstood efforts to recreate the soul and the inflection of the spiritual, as they would any song reflecting a distinctive culture. Dame Nellie Melba, of all people, sang "Sweet Low, Sweet Chariot" on recitals. The white American baritone Lawrence Tibbett – who wore blackface to create the title role in Louis Gruenberg's opera *The Emperor Jones*, in the years before the Metropolitan Opera integrated its ranks – was famous for his characterful interpretations of spirituals and songs reflecting the drama of the African-American experience. In fact,

Tibbett's path frequently crossed that of a white composer, concert "whistler" and tireless collector of spirituals named Robert McGimsey, who actually wrote the beloved "Sweet Little Jesus Boy," a song so apt and so affecting that it is frequently mistaken for a traditional spiritual.

Yet, at the same time, there appeared an extraordinary generation of African-American artists – Roland Hayes, Ellabelle Davis, Camilla Williams, Paul Robeson, Dorothy Maynor, and the legendary Marian Anderson – that struggled to bring its own experience and its own musical legacy to the world's stages. These singers were not always welcome on those stages, but they reclaimed the spiritual and redefined it forever, as their recordings attest. The direct heirs to that tradition – led by Leontyne Price, Martina Arroyo, George Shirley, Grace Bumbry and Shirley Verrett – enriched the spiritual as they conquered each and every one of the world's great concert and opera stages, while the heroic quest for equality and civil rights reached into the lives of people everywhere.

And now another generation has brought its own experience to bear on this remarkable music, these testaments of faith.

"I've grown up in a world of music all my life, and I've been truly blessed to have been able to sing on so many great operatic and concert stages throughout the world," Quivar wrote after completing the recording of the spirituals heard here. "But nothing has given me as much joy as working on this recording of Negro spirituals. They are a part of my own beginnings. Of my own roots. Of family. Of friends. Of an American dream."

— DAVID FOIL

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Executive Producer: Mark Forlow • The music of Kathleen Battle produced by Patti Laursen and engineered by Robert Norberg. The music of Barbara Hendricks produced by Eric Macloud and engineered by Roger Ducortieux. The music of Florence Quivar produced by Patti Laursen and engineered by John Newton.

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African-American spirituals have fascinated audiences ever since the Fisk University Jubilee Singers revealed them to the world in the 1870s. Even today, spirituals astonish us with their rhythmic vigor, the ear-bending intervals of their melodies, the acute power of their message. But these songs of faith were never meant simply to be beheld, as objects of entertainment or even art. They were, and they remain, testaments of faith. They are the most tangible and haunting legacy of the drama of a people struggling to find a voice, an identity, a kind of peace in a new world. Spirituals began simply, as spontaneous expressions, to be taken up and freely harmonized by anyone who was moved to join in. They evolved through this experience. Enslaved Africans and their American-born children embraced the Christian faith, with its foursquare hymns and formal musical worship. But their voices rang out in harmonies, colors, and rhythms that resonated with the complex identities and expressions of their homelands.

"It would seem that many of the songs were the direct creation of the group while others were the creation of talented individuals influenced by group pressure and reactions," Barbara Hendricks wrote, after recording some of the spirituals heard here. "Many have undergone variations when sung by different groups in different locations. Yet these variations have been remarkably few considering that the songs have all been handed down orally over the generations."

It is not surprising, then, that the three artists heard here – sopranos Kathleen Battle and Barbara Hendricks, and mezzo-soprano Florence Quivar – choose to frame the spiritual in such strikingly different ways.

Partnered by guitarist Christopher Parkening, Battle's delicate and silvery-brilliant interpretations suggest a shared and precious intimacy. "Ain't That Good News!" sparkles with an almost improvisatory sense of joy between singer and guitarist. And Battle's unaccompanied "This Little Light of Mine" is heartbreaking in its simple determination. Hendricks collaborates with the Russian pianist Dimitri Alexeev, an unexpected and meditative partnership that yields new insights amid the familiar terrain of these songs. The fine spin of Hendricks' voice lends an especially wistful quality to "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and the less familiar "Talk About a Child That Do Love Jesus". And Quivar warmly embraces the great tradition of spirituals that nurtured her as a child, through the classic arrangements of Hall Johnson, Margaret Bonds, R. Nathaniel Dett, Roland Hayes, William Grant Still and others. The radiant assurance of Quivar's "In Bright Mansions Above" and the unaccompanied "I Love the Name" are unforgettable.

Some of these songs are so well-known that they are virtually synonymous with the idea of American folk music. "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child", "Deep River", and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" are part of a common musical memory. Familiar as they are, and for all their apparent simplicity, though, spirituals can defy the technical efforts of even the finest musicians. They require a profound cultural frame of reference, a sense of how these songs were formed and how they have been carried along through the last turbulent century. Barbara Hendricks concludes:

"The harmonization of these songs, with their distinctive blue notes, cadenzas, slides from



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GREAT AMERICAN SPIRITUALS
Volume 9

**Kathleen Battle, Barbara Hendricks,
Florence Quivar**

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